



D E T E C T I V E S C O R N E R

POLYGRAPH/VOICE STRESS EXAMINATIONS

For thousands of years, efforts by mankind have been made to determine if a person is being truthful when answering questions of importance. In ancient China, an accused person was told to place a handful of rice in their mouth while they were being questioned by the prosecutor. When the questioning had concluded the accused was told to spit the rice out. If the rice was dry, the accused was considered guilty on the theory that saliva dries up in a person's mouth during times of anxiety.

In West Africa, a person suspected of a crime was made to hand a bird's egg to another person. Anyone who broke the egg would be considered guilty based on their nervousness.

As ridiculous as these ancient techniques sound, there are many people today who believe the modern day polygraph and voice stress instruments are no better. And, to be sure, in the hands of an inadequately trained and inexperienced examiner, I would have to agree.

THE THEORY

The theory behind lie detection, or truth verification as it is sometimes called is the same, no matter what type of instrument is being used.

If a person is going to tell another person a lie, no matter what the reason for the lie, they do not want to be caught in their lie. Otherwise, they would be telling the truth. Additionally, a person telling a lie is going to be concerned, worried or anxious about what the consequences of getting caught in their lie will be.

When we were children and found ourselves lying to our parents about where we had been or what we had been doing, the consequences about lying and getting caught in our lie might be restriction, privileges taken away or a good "old fashioned" paddling. On the other hand, if we are suspected of committing a serious crime and are being questioned by the police, the consequences of being caught in our lie might be that we will be arrested and jailed.



POLYGRAPH vs. VOICE STRESS

Ask any polygraphist which is best and they will tell you. Ask a voice stress examiner which is the best, most reliable instrument and they will be glad to chime in. The “truth is”, without a competent, well trained examiner, neither should be used. On the other hand, a modern polygraph or voice stress instrument can be an invaluable tool to law enforcement in solving crimes and eliminating person from suspicion.

Far more persons are found to have been truthful when answering questions posed by an examiner than are found to have lied.

CAN AN EXAMINER MAKE A MISTAKE?

Sure they can. Lie detection or truth verification is not an exact science. It is however based on scientific principles. Properly formulated questions, requiring only “yes” or “no” answers must be drafted and fully discussed with the person being examined before the test begins. There are never any surprise questions during these types of tests. In fact, if a person does not want to take a polygraph or voice stress examination, or does not want to answer a particular question, they can simply decline and walk away.

A person cannot be compelled by law enforcement to sit for such a test. Unlike obtaining a blood or saliva sample from a suspect who can be compelled by a court order, courts in the United States do not issue orders requiring someone to submit to a lie detection test. In some cases, a judge may become involved in the mechanics of setting up such an examination in a case when both the prosecution and defense come to an agreement that a test will be administered and that the results will be admitted into evidence, no matter what the results.

If you have any questions about polygraph or voice stress examinations and how they are used in a criminal case, feel free to contact me or any member of the Atlantis Police Department.

Sincerely,

Det. Marvin Jenne

DET. MARVIN JENNE, ID #400
ATLANTIS POLICE DEPARTMENT

Links: www.polygraph.org www.policepolygraph.org
www.nacvsa.com www.internationalsocietyofstressanalysts.org

